

VALLEY VISION

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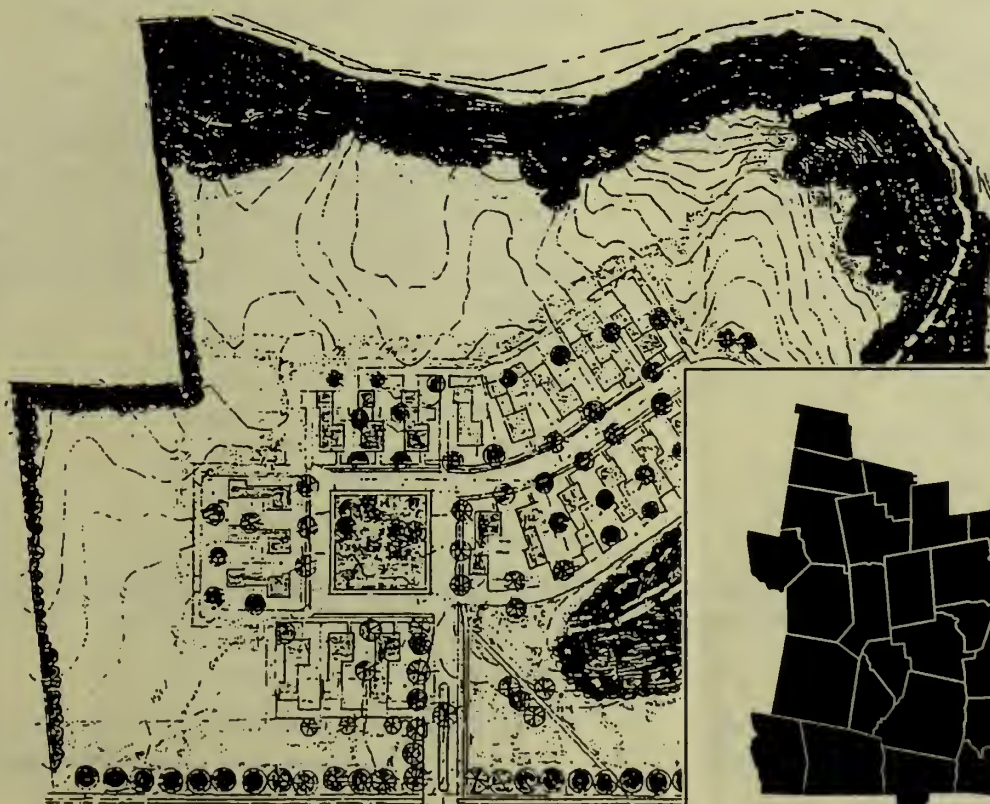
The Pioneer Valley Regional Land Use Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENT
COLLECTION

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1996

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
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West Springfield, MA 01089

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WHY DO WE NEED A REGIONAL LAND USE PLAN?

As the Pioneer Valley approaches the year 2000, it is faced with significant growth-related challenges and problems, including:

- uncontrolled sprawl, or dispersed growth patterns, which degrades community character, quality of life and the environment;
- declining urban centers, with a concentration of poverty, crime, disinvestment and urban problems in the region's core cities;
- air quality which is among the worst in the nation, worsened by a steady increase in vehicle trips and miles traveled;
- environmental impacts of growth on the region's rivers, lakes, water supplies, wetlands, forests, wildlife and open space;
- fragmented, locally-determined land use decisionmaking, which contributes to urban sprawl;
- inequitable distribution of the tax revenues and public investment;
- the incremental loss of farmlands and the region's agricultural heritage;
- changes in family size and type, and an aging population which require new forms of housing.

The Regional Land Use Plan for the Pioneer Valley has not been updated since 1978. Federal laws, including the Clean Air Act and the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (or ISTEA), require the region to develop regionally-coordinated plans for land use and an efficient intermodal transportation system.

With these challenges, however, come important new opportunities. Across the United States and this region, there has been an increasing trend toward regional cooperation and problem-solving. New technologies, such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), allow planners to create sophisticated computerized maps to analyze land characteristics.

Together, the 1996 Regional Land Use Plan and Growth Policies are intended to provide meaningful guidance to the communities of the Pioneer Valley in developing regionally-consistent local master plans and zoning bylaws, and in making other land use or growth decisions. They are accompanied by an implementation strategy which provides communities with detailed guidance on how to put this plan into action.



A VISION FOR THE VALLEY

The overall vision of the Pioneer Valley in the 21st century is to promote diverse, economically and environmentally healthy communities framed by greenbelts of open space and connected by a high-quality intermodal transportation system.

Key components of this vision include:

- communities integrate housing, shops, offices, schools, parks and civic facilities into compact areas, to make it easier to walk, bicycle and use transit;
- sprawling growth is minimized and replaced by alternative development patterns, including revitalized mixed-use urban centers, as well as traditional neighborhood developments and satellite growth centers in suburban/rural areas;
- the regional transportation system provides a variety of interconnected options, including roads, transit, pedestrian and bicycle paths, which link all destinations, ensuring effective mobility for people and goods.
- the substantial majority of housing and employment is targeted to urban growth areas, so services can be provided efficiently;
- natural resources and environmental quality are conserved and improved;
- cities and towns are made more livable by re-greening them with ample open space, squares, greens and parks, and improved access to cleaner waterways;
- urbanized areas are enclosed by well-defined greenbelts of farmland, forestland, or wildlife corridors which are permanently protected;
- rural character is preserved by supporting farming and forestry, clustered or village-centered housing, and traditional town centers;
- housing options are available for citizens of diverse ages and economic means; and
- communities strive for a balance of jobs and housing, which helps to reduce the need for long commutes to work.



THE PROCESS OF PREPARING THE REGIONAL LAND USE PLAN

Four steps constituted the process of preparing the Regional Land Use Plan.

Regional Goals and Objectives

An Advisory Committee of planners and community officials from the region was convened to advise the Planning Commission on preparation of the Regional Goals and Objectives and on the choice of a preferred build-out scenario.

Regional Build-out Scenarios

Projections were made for the amount of additional land likely to be developed by the year 2020. Three alternative build-out scenarios were developed showing possible ways this additional developed acreage could be distributed over the region. These three scenarios were:

- a) dispersed development, in which growth continues as it does now, with sprawling residential and commercial development;
- b) compact growth, in which one-third of the projected growth is assumed to be four times as densely built as in the dispersed scenario; and
- c) satellite growth centers, in which two-thirds of the projected growth is assumed to be four times as densely built as in the dispersed scenario, and half of that dense development is allocated to fourteen growth centers in the region.

Land Suitability Analysis

All land in the Pioneer Valley was evaluated to determine its suitability for development, based on land characteristics such as environmental constraints, carrying capacity, existing uses, use restrictions, public infrastructure, and proximity to urban centers. A GIS-based Regional Land Use Suitability Map was produced.

Regional Land Use Plan

After the committee chose the satellite growth center scenario as their preferred alternative, the Regional Land Use Plan was developed, using Geographic Information Systems technology. It illustrates the recommended locations across the region of ten categories of land use:

- land suitable for satellite growth centers, with mixed residential and commercial uses
- land suitable for compact development for all uses
- land suitable for urban economic investment areas
- land suitable for protected open space
- sensitive natural areas, suitable for low density residential uses with appropriate controls
- land suitable for low density commercial and industrial uses
- land suitable for low density residential uses



REGIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Land Use Planning

Goal: Community zoning bylaws and land use decisions are consistent with community and regional master plans.

Objectives: Adopt regionally-consistent master plans.
Develop local zoning and growth management controls consistent with regional goals.
Reflect municipal goals in regional plans.
Develop a regional process for land use decisionmaking.

Growth Impacts and Community Character

Goal: New development is designed to enhance community character, maximize quality of life, support a diversified economy and minimize negative impacts.

Objectives: Discourage urban sprawl.
Protect community character.
Share regional benefits and burdens.
Promote a balance of jobs and housing.

Revitalization of City and Town Centers

Goal: City and town centers are the vibrant focus of community life and commerce.

Objectives: Revitalize urban core areas.
Revitalize town and village centers.
Facilitate urban redevelopment.
Promote transit-oriented developments.
Encourage mixed uses.
Locate new public institutions and services in urban or town centers.
Redevelop vacant and underutilized urban areas.
Promote adaptive re-use of historic buildings.
Direct rural growth in rural areas to existing town centers.

Residential Development

Goal: Compact residential development, in pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods of diverse housing types, near employment or community centers.

Objectives: Encourage traditional neighborhood developments.
Promote a diversity of housing types.
Balance urban development with creation of parkland and open space.

Commercial and Industrial Development

Goal: Existing commercial and industrial centers are revitalized.

Objectives: Minimize commercial strip development.
Redevelop vacant or underutilized industrial areas.
Retrofit low-density commercial areas.
Promote strong central business districts.
Promote attractive commercial and industrial development consistent with community character.
Direct new high-density development to major transportation intersections.
Encourage development that mixes commercial and residential uses.
Promote employment centers served by transit.

Environmental Quality

Goal: Our region's key environmental assets are protected, restored and enhanced.

Objectives: Adopt regionally-consistent land use controls.
Create a regional system of greenbelts, protected open space and recreational areas.
Provide urban recreational areas and greenways, particularly along waterfronts.
Improve air quality.
Protect water resources.
Protect prime agricultural land.

Transportation

Goal: A coordinated, multi-modal, economically- and environmentally-sound transportation system moves people and goods safely, dependably and efficiently.

Objectives: Develop a regional network of bicycle and pedestrian trails.
Integrate pedestrian, bicycle and transit access into new and existing developments.
Encourage travel alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle.
Minimize new highway construction and keep the existing roadways well-maintained.
Promote road and bridge design consistent with community character.

Infrastructure

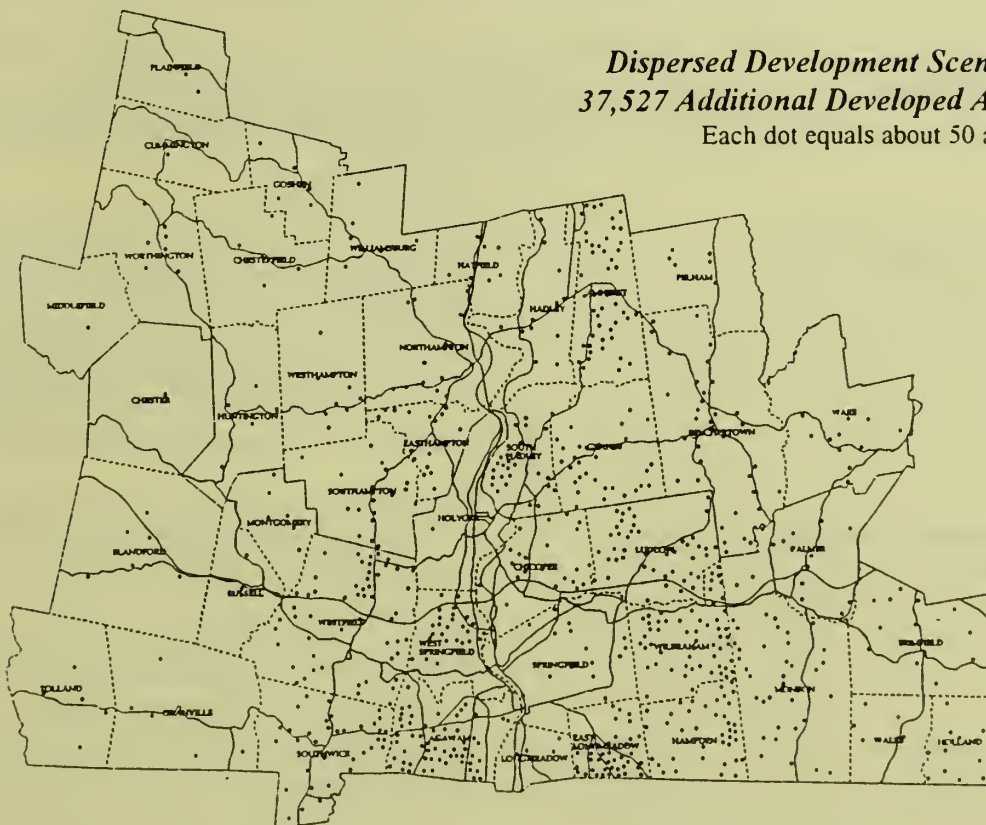
Goal: Safe, reliable and high quality infrastructure is provided.

Objectives: Direct new development to areas served by infrastructure.
Confine infrastructure expansion to carefully-planned growth areas.

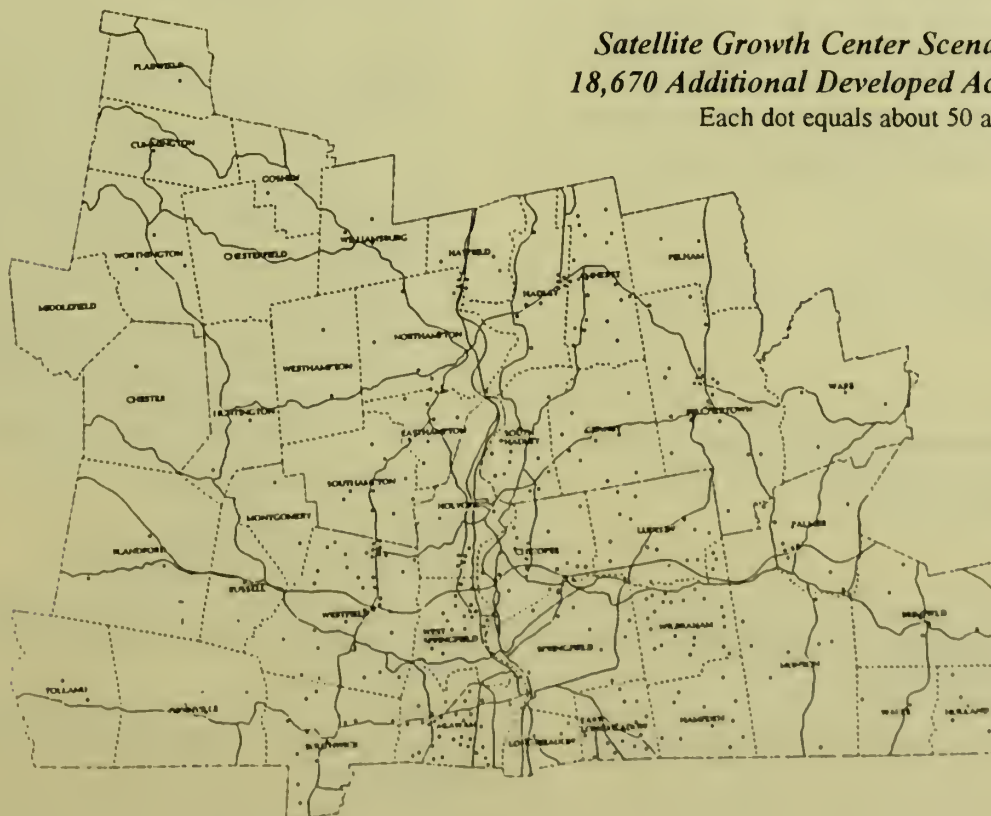


ALTERNATIVE REGIONAL BUILD-OUT SCENARIOS

Dispersed Development Scenario
37,527 Additional Developed Acres
Each dot equals about 50 acres.



Satellite Growth Center Scenario
18,670 Additional Developed Acres
Each dot equals about 50 acres.





REGIONAL LAND USE PLAN: COMPOSITION OF GIS MAPPING DATA LAYERS

<i>Land Use Category</i>	<i>Data Layers in Composition (Source)</i>
1) Open Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water bodies (1985 UMass/MacConnell)• Hydrology (MassGIS)
2) Existing Developed Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Land use, including residential, commercial, industrial, transportation, waste disposal (1985 UMass/MacConnell)
3) Existing Outdoor Recreation and Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (MassGIS)• Municipal, state, federally-owned land (MassGIS)• Public and private outdoor recreation areas (MassGIS)
4) Land Suitable for Protected Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watersheds for public water supply reservoirs (DEP)• 100-year floodplains (FEMA)• Aquifer Protection Overlay Zones (DEP)• Zone II wellhead protection areas for public wells (DEP)• Interim wellhead protection areas (DEP)• Wetlands and 100-foot buffer around wetlands• Steep slopes over 15%
5) Land Suitable for Urban Economic Investment Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Economic opportunity areas (PVPC)• Vacant land in industrial parks (PVPC)
6) Land Suitable for Satellite Growth Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Undeveloped, unprotected, unconstrained land within 3/4 mile of selected major highway intersections
7) Land Suitable for Compact Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For communities over 9000 population, undeveloped, unprotected, unconstrained land within a buffer of at least 3 of the following: radius of water line; sewer line; transit line; major employer; census designated place; or interstate highway interchange.• For communities under 9000 population, undeveloped, unprotected, unconstrained land within buffer of town center.
8) Environmentally Sensitive Areas, Suitable for Low Density Residential Uses with Appropriate Controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lands not included in categories 1-7, which are• Active farms (UMass/MacConnell, 1985)• Rare species priority habitats• 200-buffer around other water bodies
9) Land Suitable for Low Density Commercial and Industrial Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lands zoned commercial or industrial, and not included in categories 1-8
10) Land Suitable for Low Density Residential Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lands zoned residential or agricultural, and not included in categories 1-8



INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The Regional Land Use Plan includes strategies for implementing its recommendations on a local level. The following are several key strategies which will achieve multiple objectives of the plan. These strategies should be adopted, where applicable, by the communities in our region.

- Encourage **compact development** through zoning. Provide incentives for urban infill, clustered residential and mixed use villages within or immediately surrounding growth centers in order to increase pedestrian/bicycle access, jobs and affordable housing.
- Encourage **Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)**. Rezone areas along transit lines to allow for TODs which are concentrations of moderate and high density housing, civic facilities, and mixed use business establishments. Provide incentives to developers for installing pedestrian amenities such as bus shelters or benches.
- Allow **Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND)**. Change zoning to allow TNDs which have grid-like street patterns with sidewalks and street trees, medium to high-density housing, and are walking distance to shops and services.
- Establish **public-private partnerships** for commercial improvements. Work to restore existing down-towns or to retrofit dilapidated strip malls through Economic Target Areas, Business Improvement Districts, and Main Street programs.
- **Limit infrastructure** expansions. Create a master plan depicting future infrastructure expansions based on a planned growth scheme.
- Promote **mixed use developments**. Change zoning to allow mixed uses in downtowns, old industrial buildings, and single use commercial districts.
- Establish **greenbelts** or blueways. Create protected open spaces along rivers, abandoned rail lines and other linear features to contain urban growth. Provide recreational opportunities and wildlife migration corridors while protecting natural features.
- Redevelop **brownfields**. Identify and prioritize potentially developable abandoned and contaminated sites within each community. Provide incentives to redevelopment through public-private partnerships and tax benefits.
- Control **commercial strip development**. Establish limited access highways with service complexes and self-contained business or industrial parks. Change zoning to restrict commercial strips and allow planned business developments. Create highway business zones with performance standards.
- Increase **pedestrian, bicycle and transit** activity. Require new developments to include circulation plans for pedestrians, bicycles and transit. Improve bus stops and other transit amenities.



THE NEW URBANISM: TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENTS

After decades of sprawling suburban subdivisions, planners are beginning to realize the advantages of the traditional neighborhoods built before World War II. These older neighborhoods and towns have design characteristics which foster a sense of safety and community. New developments built to these traditional standards (summarized below) recreate traditional communities and prove to be very desirable places to live.

Village Streets

- A gridded street pattern replaces isolated developments, with many cul-de-sacs and broad, fast connector streets between each subdivision.
- Relatively short and narrow streets, with two ten-foot travel lanes, define public spaces between houses.
- Shade trees are planted between the street and sidewalk at twenty-foot intervals.
- Visitors park on the streets, parallel to the curb.
- Streets have low traffic volume and speed, because the grid pattern allows many paths to a goal and residents can walk or ride bicycles to many destinations.

Residential Areas

- Houses are on small lots of one-quarter acre to one-sixth acre with modest front yard setbacks of 15 to 20 feet. Fences or hedges separate the front yard from the sidewalk. Many houses have front porches.
- Garages or parking is to the rear or along an alley, so that houses put their best face towards the street.
- Houses are predominantly single-family homes, with some row houses, apartments, and granny apartments mixed in.
- The homes are clustered around pretty public spaces, such as town commons, parks and playgrounds. Fifty percent of a neighborhood is open space, including commons and greenbelts abutting many homes.

Retail Areas

- Shopping takes place on intimate Main Streets, with stores lined up along sidewalks and parking to the rear and along the curb.
- Shops have one or two floors of offices or apartments above.
- Storefronts are brick, stone or clapboards, with awnings and discreet signs.
- Both sides of the street have shade trees and street lamps.
- A residential neighborhood has a convenient corner store, to which residents can walk or bicycle.

Transportation

- Walking is encouraged throughout a development by the presence of sidewalks, street trees, slow car traffic, and nearby shopping and recreation.
- Neighborhoods and places of employment are clustered near public transit stops.

Civic Uses

- Town centers are located on a common or square, with several municipal and public buildings fronting on the common, as well as stores and homes.

"The New Urbanism is concerned with both the pieces and the whole. It applies principles of urban design to the region in two ways. First, urbanism--defined by its diversity, pedestrian scale, public space, and structure of bounded neighborhoods--should be applied throughout a metropolitan region regardless of location: in suburbs and new growth areas as well as within the city. And second, the entire region should be 'designed' according to similar urban principles. It should, like a neighborhood, be structured by public space, its circulation system should support the pedestrian, it should be both diverse and hierarchical and it should have discernible edges."

Peter Calthorpe

From: Peter Katz, *The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community*, 1994